

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009*

**Remarks on the Presidential and Provincial Elections in Afghanistan and an Exchange With Reporters**

*August 21, 2009*

*The President.* Good afternoon, everybody. I want to say a few words about this week's election in Afghanistan. This was an important step forward in the Afghan's people's efforts to take control of their future, even as violent extremists are trying to stand in their way.

This election was run by the Afghan people. In fact, it was the first democratic election run by Afghans in over three decades. More than 30 Presidential candidates and more than 3,000 Provincial council candidates ran for office, including a record number of women. Some 6,000 polling stations were open around the country, and Afghan national security forces took the lead in providing security.

Over the last few days, and particularly yesterday, we've seen acts of violence and intimidation by the Taliban, and there may be more in the days to come. We knew that the Taliban would try to derail this election. Yet even in the face of this brutality, millions of Afghans exercised the right to choose their leaders and determine their own destiny. And as I watched the election, I was struck by their courage in the face of intimidation and their dignity in the face of disorder.

There is a clear contrast between those who seek to control their future at the ballot box and those who kill to prevent that from happening. Once again, extremists in Afghanistan have shown themselves willing to murder innocent Muslims—men, women, and children—to advance their aims. But I believe that the future belongs to those who want to build, not those who want to destroy. And that is the future that was sought by the Afghans who went to the polls and the Afghan national security forces who protected them.

The United States did not support any candidate in this election. Our only interest was the result fairly, accurately reflecting the will of the Afghan people. And that is what we will continue to support as the votes are counted and we wait for the official results from the Afghan Independent Electoral Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission.

Meanwhile, we will continue to work with our Afghan partners to strengthen Afghan security, governance, and opportunity. Our goal is clear: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaida and their extremist allies. That goal will be achieved—and our troops will be able to come home—as Afghans continue to strengthen their own capacity and take responsibility for their own future.

Our men and women in uniform are doing an extraordinary job in Afghanistan; so are the civilians who serve by their side. All of them are in our thoughts and prayers, as are their families back home. This is not a challenge that we asked for; it came to our shores when Al Qaida launched the 9/11 attacks from Afghanistan. But America, our allies and partners, and above all, the Afghan people share a common interest in pursuing security, opportunity, and justice.

We look forward to renewing our partnership with the Afghan people as they move ahead under a new Government. I want to again congratulate the Afghanistan people on carrying out this historic election and wish them a blessed month as they come together to welcome the beginning of Ramadan.

Thanks very much, everybody.

*Release of Convicted Terrorist Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed al-Megrahi to Libya*

Q. What about the hero's welcome in Libya, sir?

Q. Do you consider Libya a terrorist state, sir?

*The President.* I think it was highly objectionable.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:39 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. A reporter referred to Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed al-Megrahi, a Libyan intelligence officer convicted at the Scottish Court in the Netherlands of murder on December 21, 1988, for the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Afghanistan : Presidential and Provincial elections; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

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